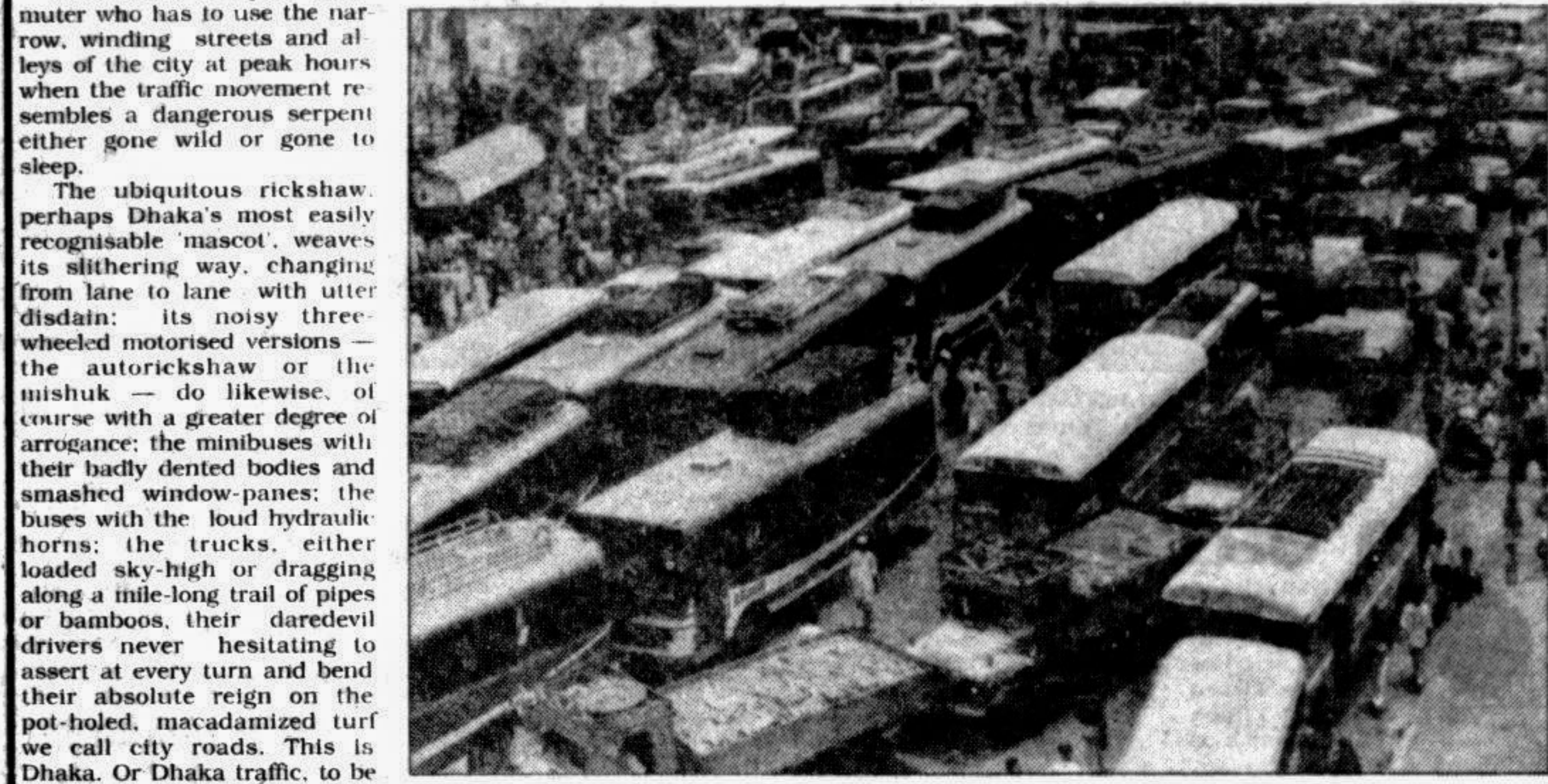


SAVE DHAKA

TRAFFIC & TRANSPORT: PART — 1

The Chaos Called Dhaka Traffic

By Afzal H Khan



Managing despite the madness. — Star photo

Traffic in Dhaka, the busy capital of a country of 120 million people, often comes to a virtual standstill. This happens almost everyday, especially during the rush hours in the mornings, late afternoons and evenings.

Woe befalls the poor commuter who has to use the narrow, winding streets and alleys of the city at peak hours when the traffic movement resembles a dangerous serpent either gone wild or gone to sleep.

The ubiquitous rickshaw, perhaps Dhaka's most easily recognisable 'mascot', weaves its slithering way, changing from lane to lane with utter disdain: its noisy three-wheeled motorised versions — the autorickshaw or the mishuk — do likewise, of course with a greater degree of arrogance; the minibuses with their badly dented bodies and smashed window-panes; the trucks, either loaded sky-high or dragging along a mile-long trail of pipes or bamboos, their daredevil drivers never hesitating to assert at every turn and bend their absolute reign on the pot-holed, macadamized turf we call city roads. This is Dhaka. Or Dhaka traffic, to be more precise.

And why have things come to such a pass? Simply because, over the years, successive governments, for reasons best known to themselves, have either by design or default failed to tackle the tricky task of bringing a semblance of order on the streets.

Outdated laws, inefficient administration, incompetent, demoralised and thoroughly corrupt enforcers, an almost total lack of civic sense among road-users, and the general tendency of the public towards flouting rules have all contributed to compounding the crisis to such an extent that today any solution to this problem, which gets worse by the hour, seems a utopian dream.

The editor of a daily newspaper not too long ago described the problem thus: 'As if there is no government, no city corporation, no police, no housing. Start from anywhere in the city, going to your destination becomes an impossible task.'

'The moment you step out of your home, office or factory, you are caught in a traffic mess (that can take anywhere between one to three hours to clear, if you are lucky,' he wrote.

In fact, there is no discipline on the roads. Nobody cares about traffic rules. Movement through city thoroughfares, both by vehicles (motorised and non-motorised) and pedestrians are controlled by their wills.

There are 2231.30 kilometers of roads and lanes in the city under the jurisdiction of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). Most of these streets remained choked with different types of vehicles.

The traffic police, always in short numbers, remain helpless in this jungle of vehicles all around them. More often than not, their directives or signals are ignored with impunity by one and all.

At some key points in the city, the roads become gridlocked with buses, trucks, cars, rickshaws and pushcarts heading in all directions, with the poor cop displaying great wisdom by walking away from his post to the relative peace at a roadside tea stall or the cooler comfort of a tall building or tree.

Ask him what the hell, what's going on and he is sure to come up with the most clever response: a shrug of his drooping shoulders, followed by a practised glance the other way, ignoring both your inquiry and your insults.

And as if the simultaneous use of road lanes by slow and fast-moving vehicles, unauthorised parking, illegal overtaking, mushrooming bazaars encroaching on the roads were not quite enough, the uncoordinated perpetual hunt for treasures hidden beneath the asphalt by such agencies as the T&T, Wasa, Desa, PDB, Titas Gas and what not adds to the already aggravated situation.

One of the major reasons behind the traffic congestion has been the rapid growth of the number of vehicles in the city. The villain of the piece is undoubtedly the rickshaw, whose number has proliferated almost at pace with the other Dhaka hazard, the mosquito.

There are more than three lakh rickshaws in the city, although the DCC will only own up to having provided licences for not more than 80 thousand. Despite a much-repeated ban on their manufacture, factories keep churning out the rickety contraptions by the dozens everyday.

According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) about 65 per cent of the country's total motor vehicles ply in the Dhaka city alone.

The number of motor vehicles had grown to 3,66,712 till December 1994 from a mere 1,97,758 in 1989. BRTA sources said adding that the existing city streets can hardly cope with the changed situation.

Prof Nazrul Islam, director of the Dhaka University-based Urban Studies Programme (USP), said there has not been a proportionate growth in the width of the roads in the capital although the number of vehicles and road-users has been growing by leaps and bounds. There have been very few diversion roads to ease the pressure on the main arterial roads, he said.

'The city roads have not been expanded in length or width. In a word, the road capacity has not increased. On the other hand, the number of both motorised and non-motorised vehicles is increasing with the population growth.'

Rallies, processions, meetings by different political, social and cultural organisations on the streets are another obstacle against the normal flow of vehicles.

3 killed, 4 commit suicide

By DMCH Correspondent

At least three people, including a minor girl, were killed and another four reportedly committed suicide in the city and Dhamrai during the last three days.

Five others were injured in various accidents in the city and Gazipur.

A minor girl was killed when an autorickshaw collided head-on with a speeding car at the Kakrail crossing at about 1.30 pm yesterday.

The victim, identified as Shirin, 12, was grievously injured and sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared her dead.

In another road accident, one Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain, 30, was killed when he fell from the roof of a speeding bus at Dhamrai, a city suburb, yesterday morning.

A beggar was crushed under the wheels of a speeding bus near the city's main Kamalapur railway station Friday afternoon.

The victim, Hashid, 45, wife of one Nazrul Islam, died at the DMCH.

Junaid Hossain Junu, aged about 25, allegedly committed suicide by hanging at a residential hotel at BCG Road under Sutrapur thana yesterday morning.

Police recovered his body from a room of Hotel Sylhet.

Junu's father Mohammad Abdus Sattar is the proprietor of the hotel.

An unnatural death (UD) case was lodged with Sutrapur police.

A housewife reportedly committed suicide at her Dakkhin Khan residence under Gulshan police station Friday morning.

Baby, 30, wife of one Mahbubul Alam, hanged herself.

Another housewife, Asiya Khatun Monu, 24, allegedly committed suicide at Berail, under Gulshan thana early yesterday.

Monu, wife of one Dost Mohammad, also reportedly hanged herself. Police recovered the body and sent it to the DMCH morgue.

Meanwhile, a minor boy reportedly hanged himself at Patk Para in the city's Mirpur area Wednesday.

Abdus Selim, 10, son of one Jamshid Ali, reportedly hanged himself after his sister Zarina scolded him.

A driver was stabbed by another driver at Kunipara, Tejgaon last night.

The victim, Shaiful Islam, 32, was admitted to the DMCH with injuries in his chest and abdomen.

In another incident, the general secretary of the Awami League-backed Chattara League of Mirpur thana unit was stabbed by a group of miscreants at Mirpur on the afternoon of Eid day.

The victim, Younus Alam, 25, who is a student of the Bangla College, was kidnapped by some unruly youth who took him to the zoo road at about 4:00 pm Thursday.

The miscreants then severed the tendons of his left hand and stabbed him in the back. He was admitted to the DMCH.

At Gazipur, at least three persons were injured when an armed gang attacked them at Harbald Friday afternoon.

One of the victims alleged that the attackers were Jatia Party (JP) activists who called them out from their houses and stabbed them.

The Midnight File

Afghan planes attack Taliban positions

TEHRAN, May 13: Afghan government planes attacked positions of the student-led Taliban movement in western Afghanistan killing or wounding at least 13 people, the official Iranian news agency IRNA said today. Several positions of the Taliban in Nimruz province were destroyed in Friday's attack, prompting the student militants to move their bases, it said quoting sources in Afghanistan, reports AFP.

Quake jolts C Japan

TOKYO, May 13: A moderate earthquake measuring 4.5 on the Richter scale jolted the Izu islands group off Shizuoka prefecture, central Japan, Saturday, the meteorological agency said here. The agency said there was no likelihood of Tsunami seismic tidalwaves, while police said there were no reports of injuries or damage from the quake, reports AFP.

WB loan for gas project

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cluding allowing greater centralisation of the state-owned gas companies, said an official at the Bank's resident mission.

The project would greatly alleviate gas supply constraints, specially to the southern zone where the gas-based Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company (Kaico) was recently commissioned. The over 500 million dollar joint venture company requires 62 million cubic feet of gas per day.

The government has already initiated a number of reform measures in line with the Bank's recommendations and the Energy Ministry has signed a production sharing contract with foreign companies, four on oil and gas exploration and one on power generation.

A series of steps was also initiated to strengthen the institutional and financial position of the three state-owned gas companies, allowing the Titas, Jalalabad and Sylhet gas companies to retain a greater share of the gas revenue for meeting their development needs. The government has agreed to lower the percentage of gas revenue deposited by the companies with the national exchequer to 55 per cent from the existing 62 per cent, which was earlier reduced from 75 per cent in 1991.

The IDA credit would provide funds for connecting the country's two gas transmission sub-systems by constructing a 58-kilometre pipeline from Ashuganj to Bakhrabad. The credit will cover drilling of three new wells in the Rashidpur gas field, setting up of a gas processing plant also at Rashidpur and four technical assistance (TA) projects worth 10 million dollars.

An administrative and pipeline telecommunication system component of the project would be implemented with the British fund.

The project would be implemented by the newly set up Gas Transmission Company Limited. It would get expert help from a foreign company to execute the project under a two-million dollar TA component.

With a gas reserve of about 21 trillion cubic feet, Bangladesh has 17 gas fields. Gas accounts for some 60 per cent of the country's commercial energy needs.

EC hearing

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Jatiya Sangsad, an Election Commission press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

The commission published the list on February 1. The hearing will be held at the Election Commission secretariat.

Those who have submitted demands, objections, recommendations and opinions to the Election Commission secretariat on the published preliminary list have been requested to remain present at 10 am with necessary documents on the dates mentioned against their districts.

Following is the schedule of the hearing: May 15: Panchagar, Dinajpur and Nilphamary; May 16: Rangpur, Kurigram and Gaibandha; May 17: Meherpur, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Jessore; May 18: Bagerhat, Khulna and Satkhira; May 20: Barguna, Patuakhali, Bhola, Bakerganj and Pharpur; May 21: Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Mymensingh, Netrakona and Kishoreganj; May 22: Manikganj, Munshiganj, Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj; May 24: Faridpur, Gopalganj, Madaripur and Shariatpur; May 28: Sunamganj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Habiganj; May 29: Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Chandpur, Noakhali and Laxmipur and May 30: Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Khagrachhari.

Russia may sign 2 documents to join NATO programme

BRUSSELS, May 13: Russia may sign two documents committing it to join NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme on May 30 in the Dutch town of Noordwijk, on the sidelines of a biannual foreign ministers' meeting, a senior NATO official said today, reports AFP.

US President Bill Clinton said Friday that Russia would join the programme — which falls short of full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation — later this month, but he gave no date.

Clinton made the announcement aboard the presidential plane air force one as he headed back to Washington from Kiev following a summit meeting in Moscow with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Russia said in June 1994 that it would join the programme and was to have signed the documents last December in Brussels, but it abruptly refused in protest at NATO's opening towards central European countries.

Partnership for Peace provides military cooperation between the 16 countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the former members of the Warsaw Pact.

Moscow to step up offensive

MOSCOW, May 13: Russian forces bombarded areas of Southeastern Chechnya with heavy artillery and rockets today as Defence Minister Pavel Grachev warned that they would step up their offensive against Chechen separatists, reports AFP.

ITAR-Tass news agency reported that the village of Serzhen-Yurt, just South of Shali, came under concentrated fire after the expiry of a nominal ceasefire declared by Moscow.

Violence in Kashmir

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arists the Indian army says razed Char-e-Sharif, said he was now in hiding with his supporters.

'It is the Indian army's wishful thinking that I have been martyred, I trust Allah and I am alive and I have already come out of Char-e-Sharif and am with the people now,' Gul said in a tape recording delivered to local journalists.

Reporters who have interviewed Gul, a member of the Hezb-ul-Mujahideen, confirmed it was his voice on the tape. Gul has said he is from Afghanistan.

Indian Brigadier Mohinder Singh, the commander of the 1,500 troops operating in and around the shrine, told reporters on Friday he believed Mast Gul was wounded and still holed up with about a dozen men in the ruins.

Meanwhile Pakistan sought international support against what it called Indian threats of war after the destruction of the mosque which Pakistan blames on Indian forces.

'Pakistan calls upon all members of the United Nations to urge the Indian government to refrain from issuing threats of war against Pakistan,' Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali told a news conference.

'We are at all times prepared for any eventuality.'

Alli was responding to angry comments by Indian Home Minister of State Rajesh Pilot. In a Thursday television interview, Pilot said India would be forced to demonstrate its might if Pakistan did not stop interfering in Kashmir.

'We shall have no option but to accomplish the unfinished task of vacating Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. India has demonstrated in the past its might and Pakistan should know it better,' Pilot said.

AFP adds: India further tightened security at its frontiers with Pakistan today. Rajesh Pilot said security has been further reinforced on the country's sprawling borders with Pakistan and an operation was on to 'eliminate collaborators of terrorists' in the frontier zones.

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has expressed her country's horror and anger at the destruction of a Muslim shrine in Kashmir.

'This act of wanton and wilful sacrilege is yet another reminder of the length to which India will go in order to subjugate our Kashmiri brethren,' Bhutto said in a statement.

The International Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives wants Clinton administration to be active in trying to get the Kashmir issue resolved.

'It adopted last night, a 'sense-of-Congress' amendment by Dana Rohrabacher which 'reiterates the need for all parties to enter into negotiations and resolve the Kashmir issue peacefully.'

The committee urged the administration 'to facilitate a peaceful, negotiated settlement' of the problem.

The destruction of an Islamic shrine in Kashmir is 'a deplorable incident', the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Jose Ayala Lasso said in Geneva Friday on his return from a visit to India.

'The governor of Jammu and Kashmir told me the government was favouring a peaceful approach... this did not happen.'

Imran Khan

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after leading Pakistan to victory in the 1992 World Cup, he has devoted himself to a cancer hospital project in Lahore, Pakistan.

Just three months ago, Imran was talking about marriage. 'At my age it's about finding the right sort of woman with the same ambitions,' he told a journalist.

Sir James Goldsmith masterminded million-dollar Wall Street deals and made a vast fortune as one of the most cool and astute corporate raiders of his time. Married three times, he fathered three sons and three daughters.

World's richest man performs Hajj

JEDDAH, May 13: The Sultan of Brunei, the world's richest man, was among prominent Muslims who made the pilgrimage to Makkah this year, a Saudi-owned newspaper reported, says AP.

The pilgrimage, or Hajj, culminated Tuesday with a record 2.5 million faithful in white robes gathered for prayers around Mount Arafat outside Makkah.

The Al-Hayat newspaper, published in London, said Jamil Assad, brother of Syrian President Hafez Assad also came, as did Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Assembly for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

Al-Hayat said Saudi King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah held a gathering for VIP guests in a palace near the pilgrimage route.

Muslims who are physically and financially able are supposed to visit Makkah at least once.

Mojaddedi's call to cut ties with Rabbani govt

ISLAMABAD, May 13: Former Afghan President Sibghatullah Mojaddedi has called upon Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the entire Arab world to discontinue their political, economic and diplomatic ties with the present Afghan government, reports Xinhua.

Addressing a press conference Tuesday in Peshawar, capital of Pakistan's northwest frontier province, he said, the Afghan government had lost its constitutional status following the expiry of its two years term.

He asked President Burhanuddin Rabbani to step down in the larger interest of the nation and the country.

The former president also called for winding up of all Afghan missions abroad so that Rabbani could be compelled to think in terms of transfer of power.

Eid-ul-Azha observed

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ment and private offices remained very thin yesterday.

In the city, the main Eid congregation was held at the National Eidgah. Maulana Endagudul Haq led the prayers which were attended by ministers, members of Parliament, politicians, the city mayor, Supreme Court judges, high officials, elite and members of the public.

Eid congregations were also held at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque as well as other mosques and eidgahs in the city. Special munajat was offered for continued peace, progress and welfare of the country as well as greater solidarity and unity of the Muslim brotherhood across the world.

Various socio-cultural organisations held discussions and seminars on the significance of the festival.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia held a reception at her Hare Road office Thursday morning. Ministers, MPs, civil and military officials and elite of the city attended the programme.

Most of the middle and working class people living in the capital left for their village homes to celebrate the festival with their near and dear ones, giving the city an almost deserted look.

In many places, because of unhygienic disposal of the animal wastes as well as extended, unauthorised leave of the City Corporation sweepers and scavengers, foul stench pervaded the air, causing great hardship to the people. Piles of garbage, with decomposing animal entrails, remained heaped by the roadsides, awaiting disposal by the garbage cleaners even until Saturday night. Many people, especially young children, were shocked by the pools of blood left uncleared along the lanes and sidewalks by people who slaughtered their animals on the open roads.

Unlike previous years, the prices of cattle in the city's various Eid markets was unusually low, especially on the eve of the Eid, because of an exceptionally high supply of beef cattle. Even goats were cheaper this year. In fact, according to a survey of most of the 17 cattle markets in the city, cows and bulls, fattened especially for the occasion, sold almost dirt cheap.

Prices dipped so low Wednesday, even by comparison to the previous day, that many cattle traders were seen openly weeping and ruing the fact that they had held on to their cows too long in the vain hope of getting better prices. As a result, many people who otherwise sacrifice goats or share a cow or bull, managed to sacrifice a whole cow.

However, as usual, the prices of most other items including spices went up over the Eid season.

Mortar shell kills 9 schoolchildren in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU, May 13: Nine schoolchildren were killed and 18 others injured when a mortar shell hit their school in southern Mogadishu on Saturday, reports AP.

The students, ranging in age from 3 to 9, were being treated at Benadir hospital, according to doctors at the hospital.

The students' teacher was also wounded and lost both his legs, the doctors said.

There was no immediate word on who fired the lone shell that struck the school, located in the Bermuda neighborhood of this seaside city.

Buddha Purnima

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eve of Buddha Purnima.

In a message, she said, humanism, philosophy of non-violence and words of peace of Gautama Buddha can play an important role in getting rid of confrontation, violence, conflicts and a sense of insecurity that exist in the society.

The Buddhists of Bangladesh, mostly based in Chittagong, three districts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Cox's Bazar, Comilla, Noakhali and Patuakhali, will celebrate the festival with day-long programmes.

The programmes include probhat feri, barefoot march at dawn, Panchashil, Buddha puja, Panchashil, Offering to Monks, religious meetings and illumination in the evening.

In capital Dhaka, the festival will be celebrated at Dhammarajika Vihara at Kamalapur, International Monastery at Merul Badda and Shakyamuni Vihar at Mirpur.

Bangladesh Buddhist Federation has arranged a discussion at the International Monastery at Merul Badda at 4 pm, in addition to other traditional functions.

Forest and Environment Minister Akbar Hossain and Director General of Bangla Academy Prof Monsur Musa are expected to attend the discussion.

Teachers' grants

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for the five divisions are: Dhaka—Agrani Bank, Rajshahi—Sonali Bank, Chittagong—Janata Bank, Khulna and Barisal—Rupali Bank.

In places where there are no branches of the prescribed banks, the teachers have been advised to open accounts with the Sonali Bank, which has a nation-wide network.